

1990

TECHNIQUES AND TRAINING FOR PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL:

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS FROM RECENT EXPERIENCES IN INDIA

EXPERIENCES TECHNIQUES

shared numbers
participatory modelling and mapping
wealth and wellbeing ranking
livelihood analysis

TRAINING CHALLENGES

1. EXPERIENCES

These notes are based on field and training experiences in India with NGOs over some five months, mid-August 1989 to mid-January 1990. The NGOs are, in alphabetical order, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, the Deccan Development Society, MYRADA, and Youth for Action. Discussions, workshops and meetings with colleagues at the Administrative Staff College of India and with others have also played their part. Developments have been rapid and collaborative. Many people have innovated. Where I know others are writing up, I have given only light treatment to subjects. At this stage, perhaps some duplication will not matter. I feel I have to write up some of this now, and circulate this note, so that others can have the opportunity to make use of the ideas and experiences.

Much of what follows comes from Sam Joseph of Action Aid and Jimmy Mascarenhas of MYRADA. Some derives from field visits with Anil Shah and others of AKRSP. I also owe a debt to Parmesh Shah of AKRSP who has been sharing his many ideas and innovations, and to whose several recent relevant papers I recommend all interested readers. Among the many others who deserve recognitions and thanks are Venkat Ramayya of Youth for Action and Vidya Ramachandran of MYRADA for their initiatives in organising field work and training. The greatest debt is to all those who have so generously enabled learning to take place, especially team members in the field and the many villagers who have given of their time, knowledge, analysis and creativity.

The four main experiences have been:

- i. Kalmandargi: a five-day watershed-based PRA with MYRADA in Kalmandargi Village, Gulbarga District, Karnataka, with some 20 MYRADA staff taking part
- ii. AKRSP: some seven days of field visits with AKRSP in Bharuch and Surendranagar Districts, Gujarat, including a one-day RRA in village
- iii. Kistaqiri: a five-day PRA with Youth for Action (managed by Venkat Ramanaiah) in Kistaqiri Village, Mahbubnagar District, Andhra Pradesh with some 15 participants from various organisations
- iv. Talavadi: a five-day training workshop with some 40 MYRADA staff at Talavadi, Periyar District, Tamil Nadu

Most of these exercises took place in unusually favourable conditions. Both Kalmandargi and Kistagiri were chosen as villages where rapport should be easy, and at Talavadi MYRADA has been working for ten years and is very well accepted. Without such good rapport, some of the approaches and methods might not have worked so well. All the same, my hunch is that most of them are widely applicable, that their elements of participation and play will gradually lead to wide acceptance, and that in the future both outsiders and villagers will often prefer them to older more conventional and extractive modes of investigation and analysis.

TECHNIQUES

Since others will be writing up more on the techniques, I shall deal with most of them only in summary here.

Participatory Modelling and Mapping (PMM)

Participatory modelling and mapping will be described in more detail elsewhere. Paradoxically, the lack of aerial photographs and of readily available and up-to-date local maps at less than 1:50,000 has proved an advantage, forcing the development and use of participatory methods. Even where aerial photographs and good maps at, say, 1:5,000, are available, others may now wish to use PMM because of its many strengths.

Participatory modelling was first tried in Kalmandargi. Villagers were asked if they would like to make a model of their watershed (of about 400 hectares). Four or five villagers dug up soil, brought rocks, shaped the earth, and in about six hours made a model of about 5 metres by 3 metres, using rangoli (coloured) powders to show different land uses. Subsequently, in Kistagiri, modelling was used without earth shaping to draw on the ground and colour in a social map of the village, showing houses and caste locations.

Participatory mapping direct onto paper was used first in Kistagiri. The Sarpanch drew in pencil on a large sheet of paper stuck on the school wall, and farmers added and corrected detail, while a team member drew in the confirmed detail with coloured pens. This proved an excellent "way into the village", creating good rapport and leading almost naturally into walking transects with villagers as guides.

Models or maps drawn on the ground can be copied onto large sheets of paper, or into notebooks. Detail is usually lost in the process, but copying is useful as models may not last long, and maps are permanent and portable.

Some comparisons of models and maps are:

Models on the ground	Maps on paper
more likely to be corrected, by a wider range of people	less visible and more private to a few people
more participatory	less participatory
less male dominated	more male dominated
easy to change	difficult to change
impermanent	permanent

fixed

portable

PMM has a lot of strong points. It presents much crosschecked information quickly and efficiently. It helps to develop rapport. It forces outsiders to learn from villagers. It gives villagers a creative role in which they take pride and pleasure. It also provides a physical focus for discussion. On the basis of experience to date, I strongly recommend PMM as an early part of PRA.

(I propose soon to write a separate note on this, including some practical advice)

Participatory Transects

difficulties

Shared Numbers

Wellbeing Ranking

Livelihood Analysis

timeline found to be powerful in analysis of livelihoods of poor family. Someone thought each senior staff member should do this once a year, insights

Errors to Embrace and Correct

- whose orientation? (old woman, maps etc)
- falling over backwards: paper or the ground
annas or decimals
- elite biases. multiple interviews with elites. One-offs with the poorer
- no artists, neatness etc. Ecological transect, historical
artists at Kalmandargi
- shared diagramming
 - seeing and sharing
 - adding and amending
 - creativity
 - awareness
 - sequences
- interviewing poor people
 - place, time, rapport, knowledge
- presentations - paper, writing of diagrams

TRAINING

The Kalmandargi, Kistagiri and Talavadi exercises were all intended as training, but the first two also had the development with villagers of substantive programmes as an aim. The comments which follow are based on all three experiences, but especially on Talavadi.

1. Four Approaches to Training

In these experiences, training is a misnomer for what has often been collaborative R and D, adapting methods and inventing and improvising what to do next. I shall use the term training as a conventional shorthand for all this. There have been four approaches:

i. classroom. Presentations and discussions of RRA, its rationale and methods, have proved a cost-effective use of time. I have used slides more and more, partly because shared diagramming, which is visible, has become more prominent, and partly because slides bring rural life into the room. Two issues which have repeatedly come up, and which deserve separate treatment, are:

- comparing the cost-effectiveness and validity of RRA with other more traditional methods

- the pros and cons of the ground as against paper as a medium for participatory diagramming and mapping

ii. informal ad hoc. In wandering around in rural visits, it is possible to demonstrate methods informally. This applies especially to learning from and with people, interviewing, and observation.

iii. field training-cum-project identification.

Initially, I thought this would be the best approach, and it was followed in Kalmandargi and Kistagiri. In both cases, the objective was not just training, but practical programmes. In both cases these were evolved and agreed with the villagers. In retrospect I can see that this had two costs to the training in specialised methods: first, negotiation was time-consuming; second, not every participant became familiar with every method. In consequence, the experience gained by participants was patchy, differing for each person in terms of methods actually practised.

iv. straight training in the field

With some classroom sessions first, straight training and practicals with methods in the field has much to recommend it. Straight training avoids the pressure to leap from data and understanding to practical action. It allows time to work undistracted on attitudes, awareness, demeanour, approaches and methods, adding to the personal repertoires of those taking part. It leaves it to participants to apply and adapt methods for their own purposes later. It can be organised quite easily so that all participants use all the methods.

However, a major problem is that rural people are being asked to give up their time without clear prospect of gain. This makes it important to choose times of year (despite possible anti-poverty seasonal biases) which are not very busy. It also locates training in areas which are atypical because an NGO has already worked there for some time and has a good rapport with the people, and where it can be feasible and ethical to take

people's time. It is important to recognise, and subsequently offset, these biases.

2 Content, Sequence and Rhythm

In drawing lessons from the Talavadi training experience, special conditions need to be noted. The enthusiasm and commitment of participants was exceptional, and they were able and willing to work long hours. The villages in which fieldwork took place were all within half an hour's drive of the training centre, making access easy. MYRADA had also good rapport and fieldworkers who could make arrangements in those villages.

In none of these training exercises was there a prior plan for the whole period. For Kalmandargi and Kistagiri, there was a rough outline that day one would be for spatial dimensions, day 2 for temporal (time line and seasons) and day 3 for social, but in practice these were intermingled. At Talavadi, when we started on the Sunday evening, I presented a provisional outline for the first two days only, explaining that as with good RRA, what is done later depends on what is learnt earlier, and flexibility is needed and the confidence not to overplan. Introducing the RRA culture into the participatory training itself in this way seems to make sense, but may not be easy if the group is used to blueprinting.

The sequence of topics and activities at Talavadi is not suggested as a model, but may be of interest to others engaged in similar training:

Day 1 (Sunday)

Day 2 (Monday)

Day 3 (Tuesday)

Day 4 (Wednesday)

Day 5 (Thursday)

Day 6 (Friday)

Comments:

* starters. The time line and seasonal analysis are good starters for training. They do not raise sensitive issues. They force the team to learn from rural people. The time line, in particular, can be done after dark even if lighting is not good. It has the advantage that it is relatively straightforward and elicits information which villagers are pleased to provide and the team is interested to learn. It also lends itself to easy crosschecking and comparison between the efforts of different outsider-villager teams.

Alternative starters are participatory modelling and mapping (PMM). At Talavadi we did these second, in the early morning. Daylight is an advantage. PMM worked well with 8 different groups - 4 doing social mapping, and 4 doing village area resource mapping, combining modelling on the ground and mapping on paper in various ways. Groups reported to a plenary with villagers who also commented on the accuracy and completeness of the maps.

* the third lap of the mile. A common problem in other courses, in my experience, is a sag or crisis of morale and confidence which occurs shortly after half time, as with the third lap of a mile or 1500 metres. Oddly and perhaps exceptionally, this sag was weak in all three training exercises. In Kalmandargi, we anticipated it and took an evening off to go and shower, drink and eat in a nearby town. In Kistagiri, I thought of doing the same, but it did not seem right and colleagues were not in favour. At Talavadi, the hours worked were so long on the first two days, that I planned an easy afternoon for day 3, and announced it. Perhaps thinking that the pressure would relent helped maintain momentum. In the event, though, the session on day 3, instead of finishing at 1600 hours as planned, went on until 2230 before we finally broke for dinner!

* briefing by circus

3 Process Reporting

For each field exercise at Talavadi, each small team chose one member to report on process. In plenary, then, there was a report on content - what had been found out, and then one on process - what the team had experienced and done. Reports were candid, self-critical, and quite often funny. The attitude adopted was that whatever happened, there was something to learn. Error was embraced opportunity. In consequence, there was little if any defensiveness and some good discussions, raising points which might otherwise not have been covered. One good discussion, for example, arose out of the difficulty one group had managing an interview with a poor woman, highlighting problems of lack of time, lack of a place to meet, and lack of privacy, and the consequent bias towards meeting and interviewing those who are less poor.

Process reporting takes time but helps. It contributed to the extensive time overruns of sessions at Talavadi. However, it is well worth considering in any PRA training. At Talavadi it became part of the workshop culture, and contributed to learning and self-awareness.

Numbers and reporting time esp with process. 6 or 8 Problem of overlapping and repetition

What is not covered - what to do?

Size of trg team and orientation of participants

Size of gp in v. Either 4 or 5 and split or 2 or 3

competition/comparison as incentive and R and K value too

Villagers' participation in training

creative process, inventive etc

reporting on the process after the content. timeconsuming but useful

Myrada concluded:

RRA professionalism

useful for new staff
useful for starting
useful for senior staff orientation, updating

evaluation useful -- I learnt that my voice tends to tail off
applications

mentioned especially time line, seasonal diagramming, mapping and
modelling, and wellbeing and wealth ranking
used to get tired quickly with questionnaires -- now from dawn into the
night without getting tired

-applications -- wealth before forming credit groups
- starting in a new area
- staff orientation inc update for seniors
idea of negative being positive

X. Some outstanding issues in training

Beyond what is already in the literature, issues where I for one would
appreciate advice and suggestions are how to help people (and myself) do
better in:

- * interviewing: how best to teach a. individual and b. group interviewing
- * observation: how to enhance ability to notice things and ask about them
- * diagramming: what sorts of advice, practicals can be used
- * causal analysis: analysing flows, linkages, causality, sequences, etc

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- linkages between methods, using them together, combinations
and sequences

- the leap from data to what to do

An RRA Kit

As a start, suggestions for India are:

i. core items:

- * rangoli (coloured) powders
- * coloured chalks
- * coloured pens for drawing on large sheets of paper
- * local counters (amla fruits, small stones, beans or other seeds, dried
goat droppings etc -- at least 200, and more if they happen to be edible)
- * large scissors
- * large sheets of paper
- * drawing pins
- * sellotape
- * powerful torch
- * quill
- * stapler and staples
- * Bluetak if available
- * shoulderbag or small rucksack
- * notebook, ballpoints, pencils, rubber etc

ii. optional extras, depending on conditions:

- * flip charts

- * easels for displaying large sheets, maps etc
- * 1:50,000 or other maps
- * aerial photographs (not so far available in India)
- * groundlevel photographs of the area
- * polaroid camera (for instant pictures)
- * binoculars
- * slide projector
- * overhead projector
- * projection screen
- * sawdust
- * compass (but I have carried one for five months and never used it)
- * jogging shoes (early morning explorations are often useful, and wearing jogging shoes on transects can make it easier to go and look at things)
- * hired bicycles (or horses or riding camels, as locally available)
- * PPC, printer, paper and plugs (for reporting writing in the field)
- * dictaphone (which I have found invaluable for recording experiences while they are occurring or still vivid in the mind)
- * pullover for cool evenings and/or waterproof for rain. (This may seem banal, but it is striking how often RRA teams get caught out).

This list of options is long and could be longer. Some of the items are high technology and could be alienating. As so often, it is a question of how they are used, and of weighing costs and benefits.